

Truck Owner Views of County Roads

H. E. BODINE

Traffic and Industrial Departments

Stokely Foods, Inc.

Indianapolis

I sincerely hope that all of you have absorbed the good practices of highway building which have been here advocated and that you will journey home with new, clear-cut ideas of how to attack your road and street problems and put into actual practice many of the sound methods advocated at this convention.

Commissioners should not go home thinking their highway superintendents got the meat out of all the discussion, nor should the highway superintendents think the county surveyors got the best of the program.

All of you should absorb the facts. If not, you will be like the baby kangaroo which ran away from the zoo, leaving his mother holding the BAG.

Yes, that theory can be even further construed, as a habit of letting *Joe* do the thinking and the planning, and everything will come out all right. But this habit of letting *Joe* do it will not be conducive to a well planned, cooperative, sound county road program.

COUNTY ROADS TODAY vs. ROADS OF YESTERDAY

I, and I am sure most of you, can remember the kind of roads we and our ancestors traveled over long ago and how they were built. Thirty-six years ago township roads prevailed. Each fall of the year teams and wagons of all rural people were assembled and for a week or so everybody worked in a community cooperatively either to build a new road or haul gravel to repair the existing road and make it better for the principal travel of the community. That was the way our fathers were privileged to pay a portion of their property tax.

The supervisor was appointed by the trustee of the township. His principal qualifications were being able to get along with his neighbors and, in some instances, having some road knowhow. In the main,

however, everybody had a hand in the planning. The supervisor merely put into effect those operations which seemed to satisfy most of his neighbors. Then, as now, if he did a bad job in pleasing the majority, he was discharged for political expediency. During this time there were a few motor trucks. They were in the primitive stage of manufacture and purely experimental in rural areas.

The system then in effect has continued to prevail in this era of county road supervision. The board of county commissioners is responsible for appointing a road superintendent and usually the patrolmen who work under either the direct supervision of the highway superintendent or, in many instances, under the county commissioner of a particular district. Because of this manner of selecting road supervisory personnel, little or no security can be offered to the applicants for such positions. With administrative changes in counties, road superintendents and road personnel also change.

Now that your problems of maintenance are steadily increasing I would suggest that now or some time in the near future, genuine long range planning be advocated and adopted. Road building today is becoming more and more a scientific business. I say this without pointing a finger at, or even suggesting, a lack of qualifications of those among you holding these positions in your respective counties.

On December 8, 1949, in talking to the highway constructors at French Lick, Indiana, I stated the following:

"The trucking industry would recommend that the state highway commission be taken out of the political picture, that permanency be established, whereby those making highway employment a career can look forward to security and can without fear or favor perform their responsibilities. As a result more users' tax money will find its way into highways than into expensive, carry-over, paper roads and other wastes effected by administrative changes. In passing, we might all give serious thought to being Americans first rather than politicians, with the hope that statesmen will come out of the wilderness with guts and the courage of their convictions to divorce schools, conservation, law enforcing agencies, and other similar governmental agencies from the political patronage counter."

This same policy I advocate for counties and suggest since I am Jacksonian in principal, that qualifications and adequate salaries for these positions be established at once and that applicants be examined by the state highway commission and names of qualified men be submitted to the county for consideration and appointment. I would suggest that three pre-qualified applicants be submitted to each board of county commissioners.

FINANCING COUNTY ROAD BUILDING

In the year 1932, all township roads were abandoned as such and added to the county road system. In the meantime, motor trucks had developed and proven their value to farmers in marketing their farm produce to better advantage in better and more distant marketing centers. With the increase in motor trucks, demands for better county roads followed. Many roads had been built under the Three Mile Gravel Road Law, all of which had been financed by bond issue. The County Unit Road Law came along and the revenue derived from county unit road bonds did the financing.

Auto and truck license fees were being collected for the privilege of owning and operating an automobile or motor truck upon the highways of the counties and state in addition to gasoline tax. These funds were prorated from the state to the counties. Construction funds in counties were mostly provided by bond issue and the prorated distribution of license fees and gas tax was being used in the counties principally for maintenance purposes.

Since we are talking about Truck Owner Views of County Roads, at this point, I want to give you some data on motor trucks licensed in Indiana.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Trucks</i>	<i>User Tax</i>
1920	31,654	License fees only
1925	94,856	License fees and 2c gasoline tax
1930	124,373	License fees and 3c gasoline tax
1935	127,623	License fees and 4c gasoline tax
1948	213,373	License fees and 4c gasoline tax

From 1914 to 1946, \$164,966,620 in registration fees and gasoline tax had been distributed to Indiana counties.

Now that you have these brief statistical facts, I want to point out that since the enactment of the Moratorium Law in 1932, the counties have built and maintained their county road system entirely with funds provided from license fees and gasoline tax. The following data is most interesting.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Miles</i>	<i>Dollars</i>
1932	County Roads	68,822	
1950	County Roads	74,032	
1932-50	Increase	5,210	
1932	County Unit Road Bonds		
	Outstanding		\$16,719,268
1948	County Unit Road Bonds		
	Outstanding		468,573
1948	Three-Mile Gravel Road		
	Bonds Outstanding		255,755

Now I ask you how has the \$16 million county unit bonded indebtedness been liquidated to less than \$750,000 during this 18-year period? Isn't it true that the majority of the miles of increased roads from 1932 to 1950 was built principally during the W.P.A. period from 1936 to 1941 when you had all the labor furnished by the government and part of the materials on your Farm to Market Road Projects, during which time you retired your bonded indebtedness with funds distributed from license fees and gasoline tax?

Let me further point out that from April 7 to November 21, 1949, trucks sold in Indiana ranging in size from $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton to 2-ton in the eight large Indiana counties represented 84.1 per cent of all trucks delivered. In the other 84 counties, of all trucks sold, 95 per cent were of the above models and sizes, including farmers' trucks, milk deliverers, coal dealers, grain dealers, etc., whose principal travel is over your county highway system. This is the traffic for which you will have to build roads. Future financing should be provided by prorated registration fees and gasoline tax supplementing same by funds raised locally by bond issue and tax levy.

THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTY HIGHWAY SYSTEM

We are all familiar with the theory now being advocated concerning the consolidation of township schools on a county unit basis and we can expect much activity in this respect in the immediate future, and especially when the legislature meets in 1951.

There may be some merit in the abandonment of some township schools because of the small number of children to be taught and the excessive prohibitive per capita cost, to say nothing of not being able to equal and compete in giving educational programs, but I do not believe it practical to force consolidation except where the economical facts warrant.

In our system of government we are all too hasty to pitch our tent in the sphere of centralization thinking, and permit government bureaus and government agencies to be established in Washington nationally, and in Indianapolis statewide, where the cost is prohibitive and control far removed from the governed. Some such systems are good but the majority are bad, in that they overlap in functions. Once they are established for an emergency, they are never discontinued.

Our heritage of "government of the people and by the people" must be preserved. Let us consider the county, in the near distant future, as the smallest local political subdivision of government and plan constructively to preserve it.

Therefore you commissioners, surveyors and county highway superintendents must constructively plan your future acts to preserve the county and its governmental functions as such. You should begin now on long range planning in road building, in bridge building, in supporting the aged, the underprivileged, the orphans, the schools and every other act coming under your jurisdiction, with a firm, nonbiased, unwarped viewpoint. If you do not, the time will soon come when the theory of elimination of counties will be as prevalent as it is with references to township schools today.

Not one of you need shirk in your duty to your political party for when the time comes in America that men of opposite political faith are so warped that they can not join hands for the common good of the majority of their fellowman—then God help them.

Certainly any system that is old in custom and activity which permits a simultaneous changeover of 42 of the 92 county road superintendents as happened this year is not good. You men working should set up a system that will provide qualifications for appointive road personnel, for election of county surveyors, etc. Those of you who were appointed last January as county highway supervisors are good men and you no doubt are learning things about road construction at this convention which comes under the heading of news to you. You must get experience. Get it here at this convention. It is today, in Indiana, the best place to get acquainted with your job, your duties and responsibilities.

If prequalifications and competent pay can be established as our best system for selecting highway personnel the county will get more value for its dollar and the county commissioners will be less criticized for their acts of administration. Your county as a unit of government close to the people, will have an opportunity to survive. This to me is important. What are you doing about it? Are you going to go on following the policies of your predecessors for the last 30 years, following the path of least resistance and have it said when you pass on "He was once a county commissioner"? Or are you going to think constructively, cooperate state wide for progress, and preserve the county as a local governmental unit close to the people.

GOVERNMENT PARTICIPATION

It is pitiful, to say the least, that so few counties have participated in the Federal-Aid Secondary Program. This ties in to your long range planning. This is the time for counties to supplement their funds, derived from distribution of the license fees and gasoline tax,

by being able again to issue bonds for road construction and make a tax levy for maintenance. Maximum standards should be set up by legislative act for a county road building program, which maximum standards will at least be equal to the minimum standard approved and used by the state. Then, when a county road is taken into the state highway system, no immediate construction or reconstruction expense outside of annual maintenance need be provided out of state highway funds.

All of you enjoy, in your every day life, the results of the activity of motor trucks. Everything you eat, wear or use is at some time handled by a motor truck. In 1947 trucks, truck tractors, and semi-trailers represented only 17 per cent of all vehicles registered in Indiana. Yet they paid 30 per cent of all license fees and 35 per cent of all gasoline tax collected. Smaller trucks, farm operated, paid an equally high percentage of the total.

The farm truck owner who uses his truck to move his products from the farm to market is as interested in good county highways as the commercial and private carriers are in good usable state highways. This is also true of the school officials and school bus operators.

The farm owner is as interested in living on an improved county highway as the city dweller is in living on an improved street. Good roads increase land values and make the way of living on a farm enjoyable as well as profitable from a marketing standpoint.

Hence, it behooves farmers, county officials, truck operators and all who use county highways to cooperate, plan, and qualify as participants in the Federal-Aid Program in providing more and better roads. All of this is sound economy in preserving your county political subdivision.

VIEWS CONCERNING DIVERSION OF USER TAX FUNDS

Diversion of highway user tax funds is the most flagrant example of breaking faith with the highway user. Since 1932, \$14 million of state highway commission funds have been diverted to the general fund of the state of Indiana and have not been returned to the state highway fund for the purpose for which they were collected.

What portion of the prorated registration fees and gas tax which your counties have received in Indiana during this same period of time has been diverted, I am unable to say. However, nationally, from 1924 to 1948 inclusive, there has been a total of \$2,677,359,000 of special highway user's tax revenues diverted to nonhighway purposes.

Assuming that local roads could have been improved for \$10,000

a mile and that all of this money had been used for the construction of county roads, there could have been 267,736 more miles of improved secondary rural roads in the nation. Fortunately 21 states now have amended their state constitutions whereby they dedicate user's tax (which is gasoline tax and registration fees) to highway purposes only.

In addition to diversion, dispersion, has been another cause of the lack of progress in the improvement of local rural roads. For example, for a number of years, prior to World War II (the W.P.A. years I have previously talked about) 21 cents out of every dollar collected from highway user taxes was spent on local road work. Too often this money was used merely to replace funds which local governmental units previously were raising themselves for roads. The result was fewer miles of improved local roads.

A substantial part of the highway user taxes have been used in Indiana to retire bond issues, the proceeds of such bond issues having long ago been spent on roads that are now worn out and need replacement.

In too many counties there has been a gross lack of efficient use of existing highway revenues. Additional revenues without assurance of more efficient use would not necessarily mean improvement to your rural road system.

What is the answer to getting more miles of rural roads in Indiana? There is no one answer, but there are several things that can be done to improve the situation. Basically, the job will, and should be done by the local county governments themselves. The reason is simple enough. Travel on local rural roads is largely local in nature.

For instance, counties in the main are made up of local agricultural communities joined together by your county highway systems. Today, farmers own 31 per cent of all the nation's motor trucks and 16 per cent of all passenger cars. During the last ten years, the farmer's use of trucks has increased approximately 50 per cent. It is not only what the farmer sells, but also what he buys that is transported in these 7,500,000 farm vehicles over 3,000,000 miles of rural roads.

More than 25,000 United States rural communities are entirely dependent upon highway transportation for freight and passenger service. There are 1,580 communities in Indiana that have no other service than motor transportation. Of this group, 830 are towns, four of which are county seats. From reliable reports this list is constantly growing as the railroads withdraw their service from unprofitable branch lines.

Indiana has approximately three times the number of communities

in which there is no service except by motor truck over rural highways, as compared to the nation-wide state average.

Some 5 million school children, or one out of five, are transported to local schools daily by school buses over rural highways. Rural mail carriers travel 1,400,000 miles daily over rural highways serving 9 million families. Virtually 100 per cent of most crops make their initial off the market movement by highway and motor truck. Approximately 85 per cent of the fluid milk each day flows from the dairy farm to the consumer by truck, a great portion of the way over rural highways.

In 1947, 66 per cent of all livestock received in stock yards in the United States arrived by motor truck.

Indiana would be an average in the national comparison. I now ask you commissioners, can you afford in the future to divert any of the highway user tax funds to other purposes than for direct highway construction and maintenance?

SUMMARY

We should ask ourselves what progress have we made in rural road building during the last 36 years? How do county roads of today compare with those of yesterday?

Shall we abandon our past practices of financing construction of county roads by bond issues and rely entirely upon the user's tax money to do the whole job? Or should we, realizing the increased demand for better roads rurally, supplement such user tax funds by again issuing bonds for construction and levying a tax for maintenance?

Isn't it worthwhile to preserve the county as a unit of government closest to those governed in all of its functions and do some progressive thinking and planning, the results of which will promote efficiency and economy to preserve the county for all future time?

Isn't it worthwhile for the county as a unit of government to qualify itself for participation in federal aid to the secondary road program on your rural county roads?

Can we afford to divert a single penny of our user's tax for use for any other purpose than that of highway construction and maintenance? Many specific examples of motor truck usage of rural roads have been pointed out. You have been told that 35 percent of the total of user's taxes paid into the state have been derived from motor truck carriers. Every county should have a long range county highway plan. To accomplish this, a county should set up a county highway planning committee, as a first step, whose membership might

be made up as follows: the county highway engineer, a representative of the state highway department, representatives of the farm group, automobile and truck owners, rural mail carriers, school officials, and county agricultural agent. Acting as a committee, they could recommend a classification of county roads from which could be derived a priority schedule for road improvement.

Any plan thus developed should be susceptible to frequent and timely re-examination. And from this point on, progress should be made to raise the qualifications of the supervisory personnel initially or to educate them, if not pre-qualified, in the fundamentals of their duties and responsibilities. All of which will tend to promote efficiency, economy, and give to your rural areas much needed miles of better roads.